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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews studies on the use of corporal punishment in the nation, particularly in Louisiana public schools, and the impact of corporal punishment on black male students. The paper reviews the recent polls and studies on attitudes toward corporal punishment, noting that approval rates for use of paddling are significantly higher in southern states and that in recent years the Federal Government has appeared to favor corporal punishment. Also discussed are statistics and other information on the current status of the black male child in crisis and at high risk of failure, including the fact that six percent of black male students receive corporal punishment in schools compared to three percent of whites. A review of the relation between corporal punishment and culture finds that among black parents, regardless of education or income, 67 percent said that they would use spanking or a belt on a child. Only 20 percent of whites would use similar methods. A look at Louisiana focuses on state statutes and court cases, as well as studies of attitudes statewide toward the use of corporal punishment. Included is a poem, "I'm Endangered So They Say" (R. C. Richardson), and 32 references. (JB)

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Endangered Species and the Most Paddled

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African American Males:

Endangered Species and the Most Paddled

ABSTRACT

Black males are twice as likely to be subjected to corporal punishment in schools than white males. Alarming statistics have caused African-American males to be labeled "endangered species". They represent 6% of the country's population but more than 40% of the prison population. The leading cause of death among black males between the ages of 15 and 24 is homicide. The drop out rate from school and the unemployment figures for this population has reached a crisis. Louisiana's public schools is approximately 41% black and the state ranks eighth in reported number of paddlings. Louisiana's educators are not in favor of abolishing this practice and only four out of the 66 parish school districts have banned corporal punishment. Children raised in violence will become violent . School are purported to teach problem solving and logic and teachers must make an effort to use alternative behavior management procedures if student are to remain in school and graduate. This is true for all children but especially for the African-American impoverished male child who has been labeled a failure and is realizing a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

African-American Males:
Endangered Species and the Most Paddled

Corporal punishment is an old and deep-rooted method of discipline in American public schools. This practice is administered disproportionately upon minority school children especially with black male young students from impoverished homes Its use is discriminatory and the degree of its administration is generally determined by race, sex, age and socio-economic status rather than the student's misbehavior (Slate, Perez, Waldrop & Justen, 1991). African-American young males are twice as likely to be paddled and suspended than their Caucasian peers (Radin,1988). These forms of punishment convey negative and dangerous messages to many Black boys: that they are inferior and cannot excel in academic endeavors. Their self-concept is in danger of being destroyed and an attitude of learned helplessness often creates learning problems and eventual withdrawal from education. Most children start school eager to learn, but negative experiences replace that eagerness with oppositional and defiant behaviors. By the fourth grade or by nine years of age these students are potential "drop-outs". Kunjufu (1983) states that what happens to boys in school by the age of 9 and 13 will determine whether they go to college or jail and how much income they will earn in years to come. Garibaldi (1991) surveyed teachers in the New Orleans Public Schools, and found that 60% of the teacher polled did not expect their black male students to go to college. Sixty percent of the respondents were elementary teachers, 70% had 10 or more years of teaching experience, and 65% of the teachers were black.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of corporal punishment , its impact on Black males and its practice in the state of Louisiana.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The use of corporal punishment in schools has become increasingly controversial over the past two decades and criticism has been especially directed at Southern or Bible Belt states (Hyman,1988). In September of 1991, the U.S Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, released statistics revealing the number of students subjected to corporal punishment. Louisiana ranked sixth with 30,130 reported cases. This state was preceded by six southern states, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Florida and the leading paddler Texas (Dunne, 1992). In the United States 28 states still allow corporal punishment and 22 states have abolished this practice through state legislation. Two southern states, Kentucky and Virginia, have opted not to paddle (Milling, 1991 ; Dunne 1992). Several school districts such as New Orleans, Philadelphia and Chicago have enacted bans forbidding paddling (Scales,1987).

At the federal level, the mood appears to favor corporal punishment. The Supreme Court decision in the 1976 case of Ingraham v. Wright held that the Eighth Amendment did not apply and that corporal punishment in schools did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment due process guarantees (Ingraham v Wright, 1976). The Reagan administration supported a punitive disciplinary theme and the authority of educators was unquestionable. President Reagan

established school discipline as a campaign issue and embraced a return to good old-fashion tough, discipline. The Bauer Report drew alarming conclusions regarding school discipline and violent crimes in schools (Messina, 1988). As a result public awareness and concern was increased. A national poll was conducted by Parents magazine to survey public opinions on the use of paddling to discipline school children. The results indicated that 55% disapproved, 38% approved and 6% were undecided,; however, in the southern regions of the United States the approval rate jumped to 53% (Groller, 1989). Surveys were also conducted to examine teachers' opinions. A study by Brown (1988) found that 75% of participating teachers believed that corporal punishment should continue as a form of discipline. In another study by Holland, Mize and White (1991) investigated teachers perceptions of the use of corporal punishment in Louisiana's public schools. Only 12% of the teachers believed that this procedure should be eliminated, 75% were in favor and 13% were not sure.

THE BLACK MALE: AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Black male children have been termed an "endangered species", in crisis and at high risk of failure (Gibbs, 1988). The following startling statistics appear to support that notion:

- Black males represent 6% of the country's population but more than 40% of the prison population (Conciatore, 1989).
- The leading cause of death among black males between the ages of 15 and 24 is homicide (Taylor,1990).

- Black males are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as white men (Myers, 1986).
- Nationally, the dropout rate for Black youth is almost 28%, approaching 50% in some areas (Clark-Johnson, 1988).
- Six percent of black male students receive corporal and punishment in schools compared to under 3% of whites.
- Black males are twice as likely to be suspended from school as white children (Dent, 1989).
- Black males are punished 4 times as frequently as Black females (Slate, Perez, Waldrop & Justen, 1990).
- Blacks are three times as likely as whites to be placed in Special Education classes (Clark-Johnson, 1988).
- Black male enrollment in America's colleges and Universities declined by 7% from 1976 to 1986 (Dunn,1988).
- An affluent suburban white child is more likely to participate in a gifted and talented program than a Black child in the inner city (Clark-Johnson, 1988).

A sense of dignity is essential in building self-esteem and self-respect. Corporal punishment is dehumanizing, humiliating and damages personal worth. One of the most logical reasons against its use is that it is inflicted more often on Black pupils, in particular Black males (Radin, 1988). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is but one of many national organizations which has opposed corporal punishment on the grounds that it is racially biased and counterproductive to building positive self-concept (PTAVE, 1990). The main thrust of

the Reverend Jesse Jackson's urban school reforms was to instill a positive self-image program for Black children. His message urged educators to encourage a love for learning and to provide positive experiences for Black children (Williams, 1984). Paddling students models violence and teaches that problems are solved through force and harsh treatment. The social environment of adolescents can have a significant impact on how they view themselves and how they behave.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND CULTURE

Is physical punishment a matter of region, culture, race, class or religion ? As previously stated, demographic studies of corporal punishment indicate that this form of punishment is most favored in particular regions of the United States, mainly in the southern states (Farley, 1982). Holland, Mize & White (1991) concluded that the tendency to use physical punishment may be a function of regional culture. Are Afro-Americans harder on their children? In an early study by Blumenthal (1975) parents were asked what they would do if a five or six year old child did not obey instantly. A startling difference was noted between the responses of the Black and the White parents. Twenty percent of White parents and 67% of Black parents replied that they would spank until their child couldn't sit down or hit with a belt. Among Whites in the study, poverty and limited education made a difference, the poor and less educated being more likely to use corporal punishment. Among the Black respondents, the education and income differential did not impact their responses. Hilda

Sanders, coordinator of Effective Black Parenting Services once remarked, " Many Black parents still use childraising practices passed down from the days of slavery in today's society."

Corporal punishment is more prevalent among biblical fundamentalists who adhere to the "Spare the rod and spoil the child" philosophy (Maurer, 1981 ; Hyman, 1989). Selected passages from the Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy are quoted to justify its use on children. There is always a danger, even with individuals of good intentions, to take a Bible verse too literally or out of context with potentially damaging results.

LOUISIANA AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Prior to the amendment of Title 17, section 223 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes in 1976, no statuatory provision in Louisiana specifically governed the physical punishment of students by school officials. Roy v. Continental Insurance Co. was the first suit in which the court directly addressed whether a teacher had the right to use corporal punishment in disciplining students. In previous cases, the courts avoided ruling on the permissibility of corporal punishment in principle and turned their attention to the severity and excessiveness of the punishment. Finally , in the Roy case the court confronted the question of corporal punishment in public schools. It acknowledged the lack of a Louisiana statute on the issue but found that the right was clearly implied in the statuatory scheme. Conceding that Title 17, section 416 specifically provides for only suspension and expulsion, the court pointed out that the statue did not prohibit corporal punishment

and reasoned that it must logically be authorized. Subsequent to the Roy decision, Section 223 was amended to specifically permit the use of corporal punishment in the public schools of Louisiana (Messina, 1988). Only four of the 66 parish school district do not allow corporal punishment to date; New Orleans, Lafayette, St. James and St. John School Districts (Richardson & Evans, 1991).

Would the citizens of Louisiana favor abolishing the use of corporal punishment in their public schools? In a study about attitudes toward corporal punishment in Louisiana schools, questionnaires were distributed to principals in middle class communities in suburban areas of Louisiana. The results indicated that 53% of the respondents favored the use of corporal punishment for male students while 39% approved its use on females. However, 90% disapproved its use with handicapped students and 40% thought it appropriate in senior high schools. Thirty-two percent felt that the "offended" teacher should administer the punishment and 40% believed that it should be available for use by school staff (Cotham, Strauss, Vargas-Moll & Hyman, 1987).

The results of a recent study by Holland, Mize & White (1991) support the conclusion that educators perceive corporal punishment to be a legal and a legitimate process for student management. Seventy-three percent of the teachers polled disagreed that corporal punishment was cruel and unusual punishment. Two-thirds of the teacher (62%) believed that schools should obtain parental consent before paddling. A majority, 75%, disagreed with making corporal punishment illegal in the schools. In a statewide study by Richardson and Evans (1991) a questionnaire was distributed to

the superintendents of the sixty-six parish schools districts and fifty-nine parishes responded. The results indicated that 91.5% of the districts allow corporal punishment and that 98% have written policies controlling its use. However, 76% responded that prior parental consent was not required. This is in keeping with the Supreme Court decision in Ingraham V. Wright (1975) which ruled that parents may not veto corporal punishment. The data also revealed that 89% of schools in Louisiana believe that alternative behavior management techniques are provided, and that 32% favored corporal punishment for handicapped children. Paddling was considered effective for changing inappropriate behaviors (73%), and 67% would not support legislature to abolish this practice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Louisiana's public school population is approximately 54% White, 41% Black, and Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans combined make up the remaining 5%. (Bulletin 1472, 1991-1992). Although statistics on reported paddlings of Black students are unavailable, it can be concluded that a large number of those children being paddled are Black, simply based on the large enrollment of Afro-American children and on studies conducted in other southern regions (Glackman, Martin, Hyman, McDowell, Berv & Spino, 1978). Rose (1984) in a national study reported that every principal in the study who paddled more than ten Black students a month was located in the South. Considering the attitudes of educators and the public at large, it is not very likely that the State legislators will support an anti-corporal punishment bill and risk displeasing their constituents. What then

is the solution? Every individual school board must take the lead and eliminate a practice that is detrimental to children's development and education. They can emulate the Anchorage experience which banned paddling in spite of teachers, administrators and parents' determination to retain the existing policy of corporal punishment. Instead of following, the board members led, they listened to the recommendations of an appointed task force, which suggested kepping the status quo, and then they acted on what was best for schoolchildren rather than bow to popular sentiment (Scales,1987).

New Orleans School Board's student composition is 87% Black, and Lafayette, St. James and St. John enrollments are 34, 66, and 50 percent Black respectively. These school systems have officially dismissed paddling and are using alternatives to maintain discipline. They are not free of problems by any means, but considering all the variables they are not worse off for not using physical discipline. Will disruptive behaviors increase as a result of eliminating corporal punishment? The research indicates otherwise (Hyman,1989). Margaret Snooks, Superintendent of Clear Creek I.S.D. in Texas remarked " Our five year experiment is evidence that discipline can be maintained without resorting to physical violence against a student. Eliminating corporal punishment has resulted in healthier and happier children" (Dunne, 1992). Will suspensions increase? The figures provided by the Bureau Services in the Louisiana Department of Education indicate that certain districts that do paddle, such as Jefferson Parish, reported more suspensions per capita than

districts who did not paddle (Bulletin 1472, 1991-1992). When the paddle is not an option school administrators will make an effort to train teachers to use alternatives to corporal punishment. Teachers will then be able to encourage parents to use more human approaches in disciplining their children (Hyman, 1988). Scales (1987) suggests that instead of waiting for state legislation to be enacted, school district can pass local policy and spare children from violent treatment, in particular Black male children.

I'M ENDANGERED SO THEY SAY

Hear my story hear my plight
My condition's quite a fright
I'm endangered, so they say
My self-esteem has gone astray
To discipline me, I am hit
Deep inside me, my rage is lit
So I fight back, you bet I do
I model violence shown by you
I'm surrounded with despair
I'm shown neglect instead of care
I need someone to emulate
To help me love and not to hate
To show me how, to take my hand
To teach me right, to understand
I do not want to land in jail
I must succeed, I will not fail
Show me kindness instead of scorn
With contempt I was not born
Reach out and touch my very soul
Reach out and help destroy this role
That I am playing on life's stage
Filled with violence, filled with rage
Help me out when I rebel
I am going through such hell
There is hope for I can learn
To be productive and to learn
I can be part of this society
If you would just have faith in me
In your hands you hold my fate
Help me out , it's not too late

Rita C. Richardson

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